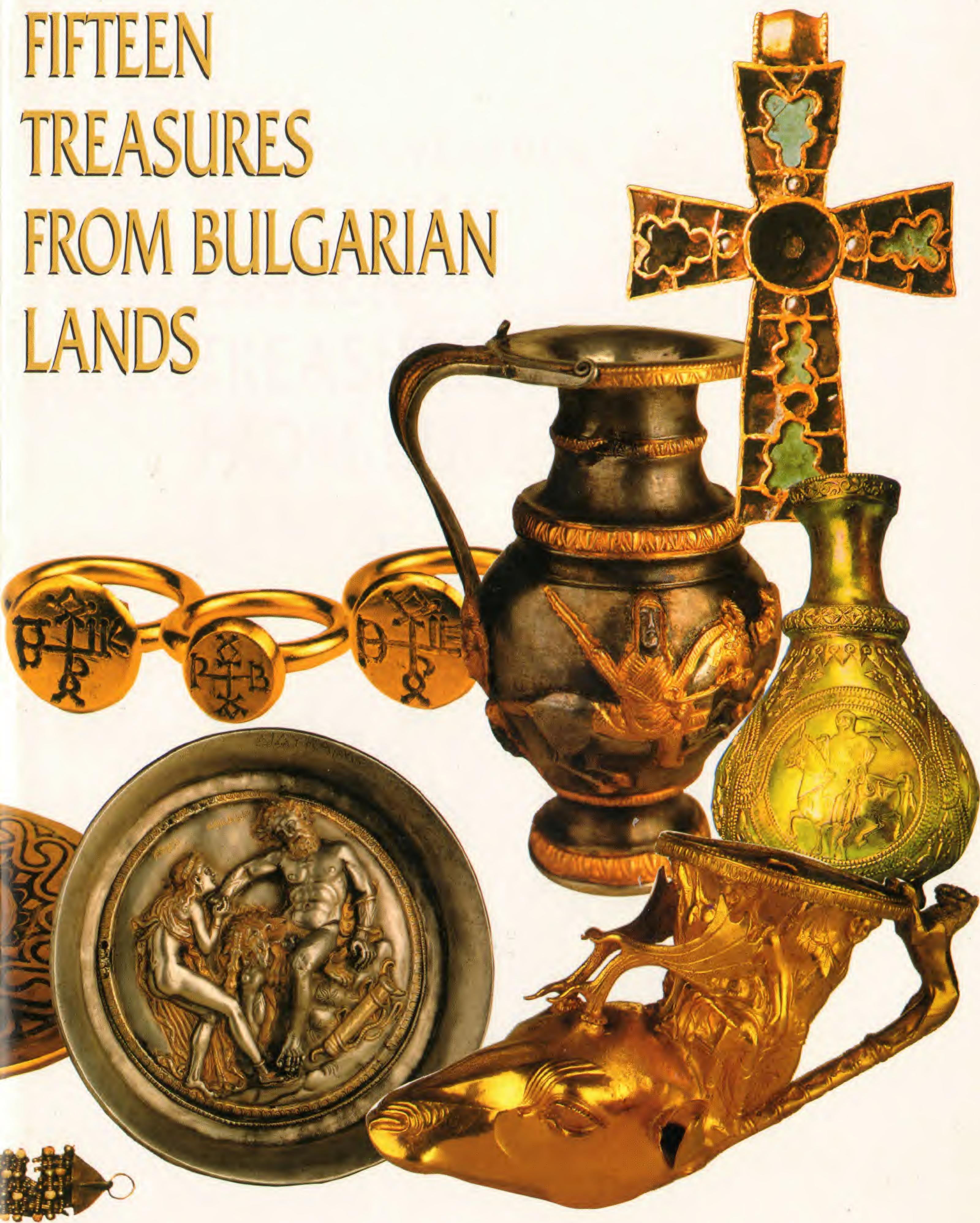


# DIMITER OVCHAROV

# FIFTEEN TREASURES FROM BULGARIAN LANDS





DIMITER OVCHAROV

FIFTEEN TREASURES  
FROM  
BULGARIAN LANDS

Bulgarian Bestseller  
National Museum  
of Bulgarian Books and Polygraphy  
Sofia • 2005

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ISBN 954-9308-76-6

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Nagi Saint Miklosh  
Наги сенм Миклош



Pereshchepina  
Перешчепина



# THE TREASURES

The word treasure is among the first in the vocabulary and the mind of small children. It comes from fairly tails about great treasures, acquired by villains and hid in secret places. One never forgets the words of one's grandmother and grandfather about Ali Baba and the 40 bandits, who hid in an unknown cave the riches taken from peaceful people.

Later your mum and dad tell you stories about the distresses during the years of oppression, about Vulchan the voivode, who kept hidden untold riches, about priest Martin and other protectors of the people.

In popular speech we have the word imane, which expresses correctly the sense of the notion – imam 'have'. This gives rise to a special group of people – the so-called imanyari 'treasure seekers', who were poor and hard-pressed people and went about mountains and plains to find, with indescribable difficulty, hidden treasures. They have almost disappeared today and have

been replaced by the modern treasure seekers, who dig up the land with modern machinery and destroy valuable historic monuments. The most valuable items they sell to collectors here and abroad. The damage they inflict is beyond imagination.

The treasures hidden in the earth for various reasons are of two kinds: those that have material value only and those that are invaluable products of art. The discovery of the latter, their study and presentation to the public is the work of archeologists – well-educated historians of ancient culture. Our lands are extremely rich in such finds from different periods – prehistory, ancient period, and the middle ages. This makes it difficult to select the most valuable among them. Let me be excused that I have chosen to present only a number of them to the inquisitive reader. I am sure that one day (may it come soon) the whole history of the treasures of art found in Bulgaria, called for short treasures, will be written.

FIFTEEN TREASURES FROM BULGARIAN LANDS

# THE HOTNITZA TREASURE

THE OLDEST GOLD  
IN BULGARIAN LANDS



*Gold idol  
in the shape  
of a human  
face*

By some unwritten rule most of the historic treasures of art in our lands were discovered by chance, during agricultural or building activities, away from old or modern settlements. One exception is the Hotnitz Treasure, interesting in many respects.

It is a scientific fact that near the village of Hotnitz, Veliko Turnovo region, there is an old prehistoric settlement. For that reason, during the period 1956–1959 archeologists from the Turnovo Historical Museum started

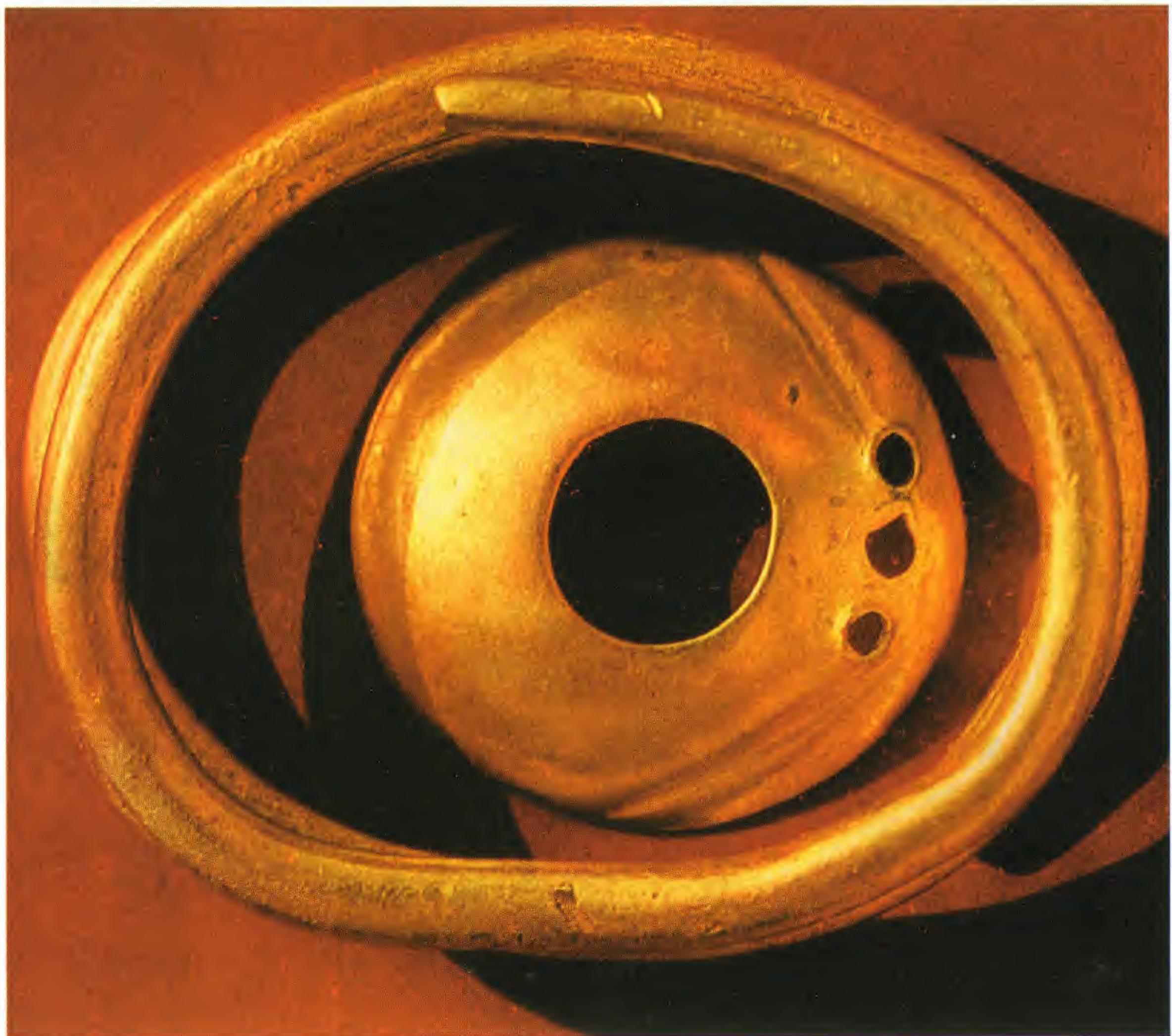
archeological excavations and uncovered relatively well-preserved dwellings of the ancient population on our territories. These dwellings consisted of one room, built of wooden stakes and walls made of small branches and pasted over with mud. There was scanty furniture in the dwellings, consisting of clay vessels and instruments of stone, bone and flint. There were small seats along the walls and a fireplace occupied one of the corners.



*Gold idol*

All the finds discovered during the excavations indicate that the village belongs to the end of the Neolithic period, about 4000 years BC. There are similar dwellings all over the Balkan Peninsula. This is the reason why archeologists are surprised by the unexpected find in one of the buildings. On the floor they found a heap of gold objects, which weighed about 350 g. This small treasure consisted of 40 small rings made of delicate gold wire and 4 gold plates of unusual form. It turned out that the treasure remained in the earth after the shanty building was

*Gold idol and bracelet*



destroyed by fire. This was definitely the earliest find of gold objects in Bulgarian lands.

Archeologists are faced with a question – what is the nature of this treasure, so unusual for this early period, when people used most primitive instruments? The gold rings were obviously used for a necklace, but an unusual one. This necklace, scholars suggest, had a magic function and was worn by some magician. He no doubt used it in cult rituals and it served him as an amulet.

The 4 gold plates are direct confirmation of this. They have oval shape with a round hole in the middle, above which there are two additional holes (only one of the plates has three). It is believed that this was the way to represent the human face. An additional proof is the small oval piece standing out over the oval plate. It can be interpreted as a cap or some specific covering of the head.

Scholars are almost unanimous that these schematic images had some supernatural functions for their creators – they are spirits or primitive gods. They are related to the idols of that period, made of bone, ceramics, and sometimes of stone or marble. Therefore the whole find must have belonged to some priest and the dwelling itself could be defined as a sanctuary of gods unknown to us.

Not long after this discovery, in 1958, near the village of Hotnitza was found a workshop for prehistoric idols of bone. This is proved by the great number of primitive small idols in one of the rooms made of bone. There are also some unfinished figures. Why they were left unfinished is not quite clear. Probably the reason was the fire

that destroyed the whole village. The inhabitants fled away and didn't return to their dwellings.

The full excavation of the prehistoric village near Hotnitza uncovers important aspects of the spiritual life of the first inhabitants of our territories. The gold treasure found there is not important only as valuable metal, but also as a proof of the well-developed religious system of this community. There is no doubt that people of that period already had a clear notion of the existence of this world, the earthly one, and the other one, which they inhabit after their death. Supernatural forces rule both worlds. This notion can be viewed as pre-religious and it formed the foundation of future world religions – Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.

# THE GOLD OF VARNA PREHISTORIC NECROPOLIS

## THE BEGINNING OF SOCIAL DIVISION OF SOCIETY

There is no doubt we are not dealing with a treasure of a trivial kind. Its nature is outstanding. A happy coincidence in 1972 provided science with invaluable data. Digging a trench for an electric cable in the western industrial part of the city of Varna the man working with the excavator discovered in the soil discarded by the machine several gold objects, pieces of ceramics and other items. Hearing about this, archeologists from the Varna Archeological Museum started excavations on the spot. This gave world culture a unique monument of the culture of the oldest inhabitants of Europe.

They discovered a graveyard (in scientific terminology – necropolis 'city of the dead'), belonging to some unknown prehistoric settlement. Since it was situated very close to the Varna Lake (500 m) it must have been connected to some of the lake settlements, built in the water on stakes stuck in the bottom. This presupposition was supported by various finds in the mud of the lake – ceramics, instruments of stone and flint, etc.

Excavations went on for many years and tens of original graves from the Eneolithic

period were discovered dating from 3200–3000 BC. The results surpassed the boldest expectations of archeologists.

Obviously there were three different ways of burying the dead – lying on their back with the body stretched and with a huddled body, with arms and legs curved. The third type was the so-called "Symbolic burial" where no skeletons were found in the graves but the burial objects were present. Very interesting are the bodies buried in huddled position, known in scientific literature as hokers. It is believed that they imitated the position of the embryo in the womb. In this way the prehistoric people expressed the idea that a man must leave this world in the way he came into it.

All graves of these two types contain rich burial inventory of objects – things that had to serve the dead person in the other world. These were vessels of clay with rich decoration of cut lines, often painted with white paste, as well as the vessels decorated with graphite, so characteristic of the Eneolithic period. They also contained instruments of copper, stone, flint and bone (knives, axes,

## THE GOLD OF VARNA PREHISTORIC NECROPOLIS

*Symbolic grave with clay mask and gold jewelry*





*Gold scepter of a chief*



*Gold applications in the shape of animals*

FIFTEEN TREASURES FROM BULGARIAN LANDS

*Gold objects from grave 4*



and cutting blades), jewelry made of metal, sea-shells (in one of the graves they are about 2200), a rare kind of quartz and china clay. There are also a large number of idols made of flat bones in the form of stylized human figures. Each of the graves contains between 2 and 5 vessels, while the instruments are placed in the hands of the dead person.

The third type of burial, the symbolic one, is extremely rare in the Eneolithic period (known with the term *cenotaph*). The lack of a dead body is explained with some peculiarities of the cult concepts and most of all with the fact that the burial ritual was performed for a member of the community who had fallen dead far away, in battle or in hunting. Observing the unwritten laws, these "empty" graves also contained burial objects. As a matter of fact they are richest in gold objects while in the "real" graves they are considerably less in number. The quantity of the gold is impressive. Thus in grave 4 (in the order of their discovery) there were 1518 gold objects, and in grave 1 their overall weight exceeds 1 kg.

Excavations established that the gold finds were placed exactly where they belonged: the bracelets of thick wire – on the wrists and above the elbows; the earrings, made of thin gold wire – on both sides of the head; the cylindrical gold beads – on the chest, between the ribs, as well as the gold figures of people and animals which obviously had a ritual function. It is interesting that in some of the symbolic graves there were human faces made of clay surrounded by rich decorations of round and rectangular gold plates. The forehead was

decorated with a gold diadem. Where the arms were supposed to be stood beautiful ritual axes of stone with gold handles. This must have been a way to indicate the high social position of the person buried.

All this is to show that the community during the Eneolithic period had undergone social stratification, which inevitably leads to a class society. The nature and special features of the Varna necropolis and especially the fine work of the gold objects employing hammering, piercing and cutting, suggest high level of technology, well-developed social and cultural processes and spiritual culture. This explains the great interest of specialists all over the world in this find. The products of art of this monument have been exposed in the most prestigious museums of the world.

# THE VULCHITRUN TREASURE

## VESSELS OF THE SUN CULT

Many people have heard of the famous treasure of 12.5 kg of gold, but a few know its history. The brothers Todor and Nikola Tzvetanov discovered the Vulchitrun Treasure on 28 December 1924 while working in their vineyard in the village of Vulchitrun, Pleven region. The two of them, together with the mayor of the village, tried to hide the valuable treasure. One of the vessels was shown to a goldsmith in Pleven, Kosta Zlatarev, who immediately contacted the authorities and the National Archeological Museum. The curator of the Museum Ivan Velkov took to Vulchitrun on the moment and managed to save the treasure. He put it in a rucksack, got on the train to Sofia, put the rucksack on the rack in the compartment and fell asleep. Such were the times then, there was no police or bodyguards to protect him and there was nobody to rob him.

This story has a tragicomic continuation. The state paid the two brothers a reward of 1 500 000 levs, which was a considerable sum for those years. But they could not agree how to divide it, started endless court suits and finally the money went into the hands of the lawyers.

The Vulchitrun Treasure consists of 13

THE VULCHITRUN TREASURE

*Three-section gold vessel*





*Gold vessel with two handles*

vessels, different in form and size. Only one of the vessels weighs 4.5 kg – a bowl with two handles. People say that one of the brothers put it in the domestic pigsty and used it to feed the pigs in it. The other vessels are cups and of smaller size. Only one of them is slightly larger. They have one handle only. They also found 7 gold discs with decorations – two larger ones and five small. One of the vessels was exceptionally interesting and mysterious and consisted of the smaller vessels of leaf-like form and connected with a small tube and having a single handle.

Naturally the scholars were greatly inter-

ested in the function of the set. It was clear it was not produced for ordinary feasts. Most of them thought that this was a set (or part of a set) of ritual sacred vessels, in some way related with nature and primarily with the Sun. The round vessels resemble the oval shape of this celestial body. The triple-shaped vessel must have been used for magic ritual acts, for fortune telling by using some kind of liquid. It was probably poured into one of the three small vessels and then it filled the remaining two. A group of scholars came up with an intriguing theory – that

*Gold disc – a solar symbol*



the liquid was of three kinds: wine, honey and milk. By mixing them the fortune-tellers determined the future and this is definitely connected with the cult for the Greek god Dionysus, who was also worshiped by the Thracians.

When was this treasure created and to whom did it belong? Opinions vary widely. Many scholars think that it was created in the Mycenaean or post-Mycenaean period (1500–1100 BC), about which we know from the works of the great Greek poet Homer and his famous works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Others relate it to a much later period – 8th–5th c. BC and attribute it to the culture of the Thracians who had succeeded in building a vast state at that time. Today the first opinion prevails – that the treasure was produced in the Carpathian-Balkan region (the Balkan Peninsula) about the year 1300 BC. Scholars today are still not sure whether the creators of the treasure were predecessors of the Thracians or not.

The Vulchitrun Treasure is not only one of the oldest and the largest in Europe. It is also of high artistic value. Its decorations are the product of all gold-working techniques known in antiquity: casting, hammering, beating out, with embossed ornaments covered with silver (the so-called nielo technique), and with welded handles. The forms of the vessels themselves are extremely original and strange. For that reason this treasure is one of the most valuable ones in the National Archeological Museum in Sofia. The world public can enjoy its beauty at impressive exhibitions among which the EXPO'92 in Seville, Spain, in the United States and many other places.

# THE KRALEVO TREASURE

THE HORSE ORNAMENTS  
OF A PROMINENT THRACIAN



*Round  
applications  
with the image  
of Heracles*



*Applications with the image of a Gryphon*

The name of the Kralevo Treasure does not come from the title kral 'king' but from the name of a village in the Turgovishte region. Many items from different historical periods have been found near this village. Probably the most mysterious ones are the seven burial mounds situated in the foots of the hill on whose top a Thracian fortress stood in ancient times.

Several of these mounds have been excavated by archeologists and in one of them (the third in a row) in 1979 was found an original burial related to the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd c. BC. Under

the mound, 7 m high was found a tomb and the burial of a prominent representative of the ancient Thracian society. The tomb is built of ordinary uncut stone pieces and archeologists discovered in it a large vessel – an urn decorated with gold foil. After a big burial ceremony the remains of the diseased were burnt on the stakes and laid in it. Various objects were spread around him which, following the ancient conceptions, were to serve the dead person in his after-life: beautiful small vessels, silver bracelets (some gilded), an iron ritual axe, parts of a harness, various gold objects which consti-



*Decoration for a horse's forehead*



*Application in the shape of a rosette*

tute a small gold treasure with overall weight of 300 g. Despite its small size and weight, this treasure is distinguished for its very good illustrations, which makes it extremely valuable for science.

The objects of the gold treasure can be divided into two groups: decorations for the body (two bracelets, a pair of earrings, a silver breast plate) and ornaments (applications) used for the horse harness. The bracelets from the first group represent spiral-like thin plates ending with a snake's head. It must be noted that in this period the

image of the snake had a positive value as a symbol of knowledge. The earrings have at the rims beautiful lion heads, which no doubt express the symbol of power and might. Therefore these decorations carried specific ritual and representative symbolic importance in accordance with the Thracian religious system.

What is most impressive in the Kralevo Treasure are the ornaments of the horse harness. It consists of four round plates with the image of Heracles and two rectangular plates with the image of a griffin, the head

of an eagle, a rosette, and many small details of the trappings. Obviously the tomb contained the ornaments of a beautifully harnessed horse, which was probably killed and laid separately, but side by side with the diseased, as many other archeological discoveries show. This is proved by the bones and the skull of a horse found in the mound.

The images on the ornaments deserve special attention. We can see the mythical Heracles and the figures of fabulous creatures – the griffins. It is known that Heracles was the son of the supreme Greek god Zeus and the earthly woman Alkmena. He was blessed by his father to perform 12 great heroic deeds. The first one was the killing of the sinister lion of Niamey. After performing this deed Heracles put on the hide and the head of the defeated animal. This is the way we can see him depicted on the four plates from Kralevo.

The two griffins on the rest of the plates are also symbolic creatures. They have the body of a lion, the head of an eagle and a snake's tail. The ancient people saw in this way the combination of the first (the lion) with the bravery of the second (the eagle) and the wisdom of the third (the snake).

Thus the ornaments of the buried horse which no doubt belonged to a noble Thracian, was supposed to designate its strength and might. This explains the precious metal used for the ornaments. It is difficult to imagine the figure of the harnessed horse with the ornaments on its head – the front plate in the form of an eagle's head and the rosette under it, the leather straps on the horse's head with the ornaments described above and the lead with the numerous gold

beads and tassels attached to it.

We must ask the question – who made these exquisite ornaments? The careful inspection and comparison with other similar finds show that it must have been made in a goldsmith's workshop on the Black Sea shore, at that time inhabited by colonists from the old Greek polis-towns. Most probably this happened in the Greek colony of Mesambria (today's Nesebar). May be the local Thracian ruler of the tribe of the Geti ordered these beautiful ornaments for his horse's harness. This once again confirms the close relation between Thracian and Greek culture during the so-called Hellenistic period (4th–3rd c. BC).

# THE ROGOZEN TREASURE

THE UNTOLD RICHES  
OF A THRACIAN NOBLE



*Plate (vial) with Heracles and Avge*

## THE ROGOZEN TREASURE

The story of the third treasure is most unusual. In the autumn of 1985 a tractor-driver of the village of Rogozen, Vratza region, was digging a canal in his vegetable garden in the yard of his house, almost in the center of the village. Quite unexpected-



*Silver jar with gold plating*

ly, a gold vessel popped up on the surface. The surprised man and his wife rummaged through the earth and found 65 such vessels. They took them home, taking them to be church attributes. They didn't forget to inform the mayor of the village and he informed the Museum of History in Vratza.



*Silver jar*

Archeologists came and started excavations. Unexpectedly again they found a hole full of about 100 vessels. Thus the overall number of find amounted to 165, something unobserved to this day.

Naturally the question arose – what period did they belong to, who was their owner, what was their function, why were they buried into the ground, and what was their historical value?

*Jug*



It turned out that it was a silver treasure weighing 20 kg. Judging from their appearance the vessels were vials (the Greek name of shallower or deeper decorated cups), 54 decanters and 3 ordinary cups. All vessels were produced by using a matrix (mould), with additional engravings or application of gold leaves on some of them.

*Plate (vial)*



It became clear that the find could be attributed to the ancient Thracian period (end of 5th and middle of 4th c. BC or about 2500 years ago). It was also clear that it belonged to some local Thracian noble. This was the period in which the Thracians managed to build their own state uniting the numerous Thracian tribes and bore the

*Plate (vial)*



name of the State of the Odrizi after the name of the most powerful among them – the Odrizi.

Scholars decided that the vessels were parts of different sets. They had been collected for a long time and represented a family treasure, handed down from generation to generation. They must have been buried into the ground at the time of disaster or danger hoping that after its end their owners would collect them again. No doubt such a danger appeared during the time of the marches of the Macedonian kings Philip II and Alexander III the Great (382–323 BC).

Naturally the great historical value of these vessels is not in the precious metals but in their unique decorations. In them we can notice various motifs. There is a range of geometric figures: elements of plants (tree branches, rose twigs, lotus blossoms; animal figures (winged lions – griffins, winged Pegasus, winged goats) and realistic figures (dogs, panthers, and birds). Among the mythological symbols most interesting are religious and ritual scenes, representing the beliefs of the ancient people. Such a scene is, for example, the meeting of the ancient hero Heracles and Avge – the priestess of the goddess Pallas Athena. There was also the battle of Heracles with the mythical amazons (warlike and insidious creatures of the unreal mysterious world).

Most important for us are the images of the Thracian Great Goddess, worshipped even by the ancient Greeks under the name of Bendida. She is represented as a mighty rider of a lion or driving a chariot with four horses.

On several of the vessels there are

inscriptions containing Thracian personal names (Cotis, Satok, Kerseblept), as well as the names of Thracian settlements unknown to us (Saidava, Beo, Argiske). These inscriptions give clear indication of the creators of the vessels and the settlements where they were made. For these settlements are Thracian without any doubt.

This is the reason why the Rogozen Treasure is of exceptional importance as a monument of the history and the culture of the ancient Thracians. Their culture combines original artistic tradition and motifs, borrowed from ancient Greek mythology. Their artistic and technical knowledge has left a lasting and deep trace in the applied crafts and the artistic images, unparalleled in their exquisiteness. This treasure still remains a unique monument of ancient art in our lands.

# THE VRATZA TREASURE

THE FABULOUS TOMB  
OF A RICH THRACIAN  
PRINCESS



*Gold wreath*

No one of the citizens of Vratza suspected that they were walking on a historical treasure. This is why in 1965–1966, when two burials of the ancient Thracian period were found under the foundations of a building in the very center of the town, they were all highly surprised. Archeologists most of all. Of course they knew that on this spot there existed an almost destroyed burial mound (the Mogilan Mound), but they didn't suspect they would discover one of the most precious Thracian monuments in this part of Bulgaria.

As a matter of fact the first tomb is a burial of a young woman of noble origin. The tomb is made of wood, an exceptional fact since most of the tombs of the same period are made of stone or brick. In the anteroom they discovered a chariot with four wheels and two horses harnessed and killed during the burial. Behind the chariot there was a skeleton of still another riding horse probably belonging to the guard who drove the chariot. On the skeleton of the horse they found 10 applications of its ammunition and many silver buttons. Again next to the horse was found a skeleton of a young woman



*Gold knee-protector (knemida)*

whose dress was not decorated. Therefore she must have been a servant girl, killed during the burial ritual.

The skeleton of a young and delicate woman, 1.50 m high, occupies the center of the tomb and by it was found jewelry of exceptional exquisiteness. In the first place this is the crown on her head, which resembles a branch of laurels and is made of pure gold (24 carats). On the ears of the buried



*Jug*



Earrings

woman there were beautiful earrings, consisting of a flat disc, decorated with rosettes, winged sphinxes attached to it and decorative pendants. Probably the woman had some kind of veil over her face decorated with gold plates. By her stood a mirror, remains of a gold necklace and numerous small clay vessels.

Near the woman was found the skeleton of a man who was probably a warrior for near him there was a bronze shield, a clutch of more than 100 arrows, and an iron can-

delabra, a set of silver vessels. On one of the vessels small indentations inscribe the name of the Thracian ruler Cotis and that of Elbeos, who made it and probably gave it to him as a present. There is no doubt that one of the most impressive finds is the silver shield (knemida), which is undoubtedly not a war but a ceremonial attribute. This is proved by the rich decoration consisting of a female head, two lion figures and snakes attacked by an eagle, as well as other ornaments.

Seven or eight meters off this tomb there

is a second one, built of crude stone pieces and a wooden roof. It also contained a skeleton of horse, bronze decorations of a wooden coffin, many vessels (local and foreign), two small decanters – a gold and a silver one. The gold decanter is decorated with palmates and a scene representing two Thracian warriors in a chariot with two wheels and with four horses each. The chariots face each other and between them there is a beautiful palmate.

It is clear from what we said so far that the Mogilan Mound housed the remains of a prominent Thracian princess who no doubt belongs to the Tribali tribe inhabiting these lands in ancient times. Together with her were buried her servants, the horses and the chariot. Later another member of the ruling family, but not of the same rank, was buried not far away.

The analysis of the finds in the tombs clearly shows that these are objects directly related to Thracian aristocracy. The ornamental and figural decoration suggests strong oriental (Persian) influence, mixed with motifs from Greek mythology and religious concepts. For example, the female head from the knee shield with the lion figures must be related with the goddess Artemis, the upright male figures from the chariots on gold decanters could be interpreted as scenes with Apollo. These concepts of different sort are expressed by typically Thracian artistic means. These are in the first place the flat, stylized and primitivist expression of separate images and of whole scenes.

The close inspection of the stylistic details can help in dating the finds near Vratza.

Obviously the first tomb can be attributed to the beginning of the 4th c. and the second one to the third quarter of the same century. This is the time when the tribe of the Tribali actively opposed the strong Thracian state of the Odrizi. This is probably the time when the young relative of the local ruler was buried. The rich attributes found speak of active mixing of Eastern, Hellenic and local influences. In this sense the exceptional find of the Mogilan Mound in Vratza is an important contribution to the study of the diverse Thracian culture.

# THE PANAGYURIShte TREASURE

THE SHINE OF THRACIAN ROYAL GOLD



*Amphora-ryton*

– Look, I've found a strange whistle – one of the workers digging bricks near Panagyurishte exclaimed in 1949. His friends immediately dug the earth around and found several other gold objects having no idea that this was gold. They took them to the mayor's office where people immediately called the Plovdiv Archeological Museum. One of the museum specialists arrived and asked where the finds were. They told him that the wind instruments were in the closet. On seeing the find he was stupefied – the “wind instruments” rep-

*Ryton with the head of a he-goat*



resented a magnificent treasure, which is known as The Panagyurishte Treasure.

The Panagyurishte Treasure turned out to be an unbelievably beautiful set of ceremonial or religious type. It is made of high quality gold and its weight is 6 kg and 164 g. It consists of 9 vessels of specific form and original ornaments. In the first place there are four rhytons (drinking cups), with the typical for antiquity form of a bull's horn (this is the reason why the workers who found them thought they were musical instruments). Each of the rhytons is decorated with an exquisite head of an animal (a

*Ryton with the head of a deer*





*Jug*

deer or a he-goat). The most impressive one is that with the he-goat's image.

Three of the vessels are decanters in the form of a female head. They have one handle ending on the upper end with an animal head and the torso or an image of a fabulous creature (centaur) in which we see the combination of animal figures with a human head.

Most interesting are the last two vessels. One of them resembles a shallow dish (called vial) and is decorated with bulging Negro heads, arranged in concentric circles,

alternating with rows of plant elements (acorn). The second vessel is a large amphora (a vessel similar to a vase), richly decorated with scenes from Greek mythology and scenes primarily from Homer's Iliad. The two handles of this amphora are also decorated with figures of centaurs. It is characteristic that all vessels (amphorae and decanters) have in their lower part an opening for drinking, which is important for the further interpretation of the whole set. The rich decoration on the vessels is very professional.

On the amphora we can see the judg-

*Plate (vial)*



ment of Paris, the siege of a fortress (probably Troy) and other episodes from the Trojan War. These motifs lead us to the conclusion that the treasure was made in ancient Hellas (Greece), probably on the order of some of the richest Thracian rulers. But when did it happen and in which of the independent ancient Greek polis-towns? The original idea of archeologists gives the answer to this question. It turns out that the unit of measure during this period, called drachma, was different for each of these towns. But since there are letters on some of the vessels of the Panagyurishte Treasure and they have numerical expression, they were weighed and in this way the precise value of the measure unit was determined. It became clear that this unit corresponds solely to the requirements of the town of Lampsak, a Hellenic colony on the southern Black Sea shore (in today's Turkey). We must presume then with high degree of certainty that the treasure from Panagyurishte was made in this ancient Greek town.

Together with many others finds all over Bulgarian land, the Panagyurishte Treasure confirms the stories of ancient Greek writers and historians that the Thracians, next to horses and wine, loved gold ornaments and jewelry most of all. They acquired them by means of war or as presents from foreign countries. The Panagyurishte Treasure probably came to Thrace on royal order by the mediation of merchants.

The function of this rich and expensive gold set is an important problem. It is highly probable that it was used during ceremonies. We must not disregard also the presumption that it had a ritual function since

many of the drinking openings in most of the vessels remind of the sacred tradition of fraternization in which the simultaneous drinking from the same vessel connected the people drinking for the whole of their life.

The importance of the Panagyurishte Treasure for the history of ancient culture in our lands in the 4th c. BC is very great. In addition to its tremendous artistic value, it reveals the diverse cultural and historical processes of influence between Thracians and the rest of the world, with Hellenic culture in the first place. For that reason it has long acquired world recognition as one of the most magnificent monuments in the world treasury of artistic values.

# THE BOROVO TREASURE

A FEAST EATING  
OR A SACRIFICIAL SET



*Ryton with the torso of a sphinx*

In 1974 peasants performed deep plowing off the village of Borovo, Russe region. Unexpectedly, two kilometers west of the village, in a place called Belenski mound and 200 m off a large ancient burial mound, they uncovered a set of silver vessels. The machines damaged badly the vessels but after the expert work of restorers on them specialists came to the conclusion that the find consists of three rhytons, a broad shallow vessel (a plate) and a small decanter. They were all taken to the Russe Historical Museum. The first version was that it was part of an eating set.

It must be noted that on inspecting the site of the discovery they didn't find any traces of a burial. Therefore the treasure must have been hidden in the ground under unknown circumstances.

The manner of production and the type of ornamentation of the vessels are of great interest. The first of the rhytons is decorated with a beautiful torso (front part) of a horse. It is made in a plastic and realistic way, which can be seen in the individual details (the eyes, the nostrils, the mane). Under the abdomen of the horse there is an inscription in classical Greek, which reads: "From Cotis to Beo."

The second rhyton is not less interesting. It is decorated with the image of a winged sphinx, an exact replica of the sphinx on the first one. It is again surrounded by decorative elements: ovals, pearls, ivy leaves and a bird perched on them. An inscription cut with small dots onto the surface again repeats the one on the first rhyton.

The third rhyton is decorated with the figure of a bull and differs from the first two. It

has similar decorative row of details, mostly animal figures, which leads us to a Persian artistic influence. This has contributed to the mixture of realistic stylistic details with purely realistic ones.

Very interesting is the shallow plate put on a cone-like stand. It has two massive handles to which are welded the heads of satyrs (mythical forest creatures from the suite of god Dionysus). They have beards, mustaches and curly hair. Their mouths are open, the nose is broad, and they have animal ears. The bottom of the vessels contains a scene with convex form – a doe attacked by a griffin with a bird's head. This is a motif well known from other Thracian monuments. The modeling is very familiar and expresses perfectly the dynamics of the movement of the two animals.

The last vessel is an amphora-like decanter (now lost) with a handle. On it, in a number of circles, are presented different scenes. In the one we have three flying swans with elegant necks, facing each other. The next circle is full of scenes from the Dionysus cult. Of exceptional artistic perfection are two central figures of a man and a woman holding a snake in her hands. The man has long hair and long beard, on his head there is an ivy wreath out of which shows another snake. This is undoubtedly Dionysus. It is interesting that next to him we see a second man lying on a lion's skin and this is no doubt Heracles, after his fight with the lion. This mythical half-god half-man is holding in his hands rhytons similar to those on the other three vessels in the treasure (decorated with a griffin and a sphinx).

FIFTEEN TREASURES FROM BULGARIAN LANDS



*Silver jug*

The question is whether the vessels from the treasure have a domestic function – let's say for eating, or their ornaments speak of a ritual function. The detailed analysis leads to the conclusion that the second presumption is more plausible without being able to determine the exact ritual. There is no doubt that it is related to Dionysus though. In Greek mythology he was the god of fecundity, the protector of vegetation and of vine-

*Ryton with the torso of a horse*



growing in particular. The inscriptions on the vessels mention the name of the Thracian ruler Cotis (383–360 BC) and the name of the silversmith who made the vessels probably on his order. May be Cotis used to present such valuable vessels to his local nobles one of whom was from the Geti tribe.

The treasure is a high achievement of jewelry making. It is produced from a silver sheet, molded and then stamped with figures and graphic decorations. The scenes and the technique show that this must have happened in the first half of the 4th c. BC. It was buried in the ground during some of the marches of the Macedonian kings Philip and Alexander the Great against the Thracians. It is interesting to mention the opinion of some archeologists that this happened after some of the disastrous earthquakes during the 3rd c. to calm the elements of nature. This has not been proved but we must note that the Borovo Treasure is an invaluable monument of the Thracian period, which combines various cultural trends – local Thracian, Hellenic, and Persian.

# THE LETNITZA TREASURE

INVALUABLE MONUMENT  
OF THRACIAN ART



*Application with  
the image of a  
sexual intercourse  
(hierogamy)*

In 1963 a group of workers from the village of Letnitza, the Lovetch region, had to dig the foundations of a sheepfold in the yard of the farm. Quite unexpectedly they found in the hole a bronze vessel turned upside down. When they took it out many small silver objects fell out of it. The workers distributed them among themselves. Later archeologists from the Lovetch Museum found the men and took the objects to the museum. It is still uncertain whether they found all of items since some parts of the set were obviously missing.



*Application with the image of a horseman*

THE LETNITZA TREASURE

*Application with fighting animals*



The bronze vessel has two handles with loops slung on them. It contained ornaments of horse-trappings and an iron harness of Thracian type. The objects are attributed to the 4th c. BC. Probably these are applications to the straps of a riding horse of a representative of an aristocratic Thracian family. Naturally the leather parts are not preserved and the position of the ornaments is only speculative.



*Application  
with the image  
of a horseman*

On the applications we can see various images, which are not directly connected with Thracian art and suggest strong influence of Greek culture, but most probably they were made in Thrace. Among these images there are many male and female figures.

Archeologists noticed that applications belong to two different groups – filigreed (typical for the horse-trappings and identified on other finds) and solid. Images on the solid applications are as a rule put in a frame. This makes the treasure very unusual and original. They are 23 and no doubt all belong to the ornaments of the horse head. Central is the forehead shield from the headstall, which represents a lion attacking a bull. There follow applications included in the group of the filigreed images. They again represent scenes of the battle between a lion and a griffin, and snakes aiming at them. Probably these applications come from the headstall of the horse, from its front and side parts.

There follows a group of seven ornaments, on which in a heraldic posture stand, facing each other, griffins or griffins attacking deer, as well stylized heads of griffins. We can notice that one of the marked features of the images is the dominating presence of the image of the griffin, which is a favorite of the Thracian torevts.

It must be noted that all the represented animals are given in action and active participation in the scene.

The second group is made up of 15 applications. The figures on them are not always included in the drawn frame and grow out of it. They are rectangular, only one having an

oval form. The major image in them is a goddess with hair in long strands and dressed in a long dress. In one case she is caressing kindly a dragon and in another she caresses in a similar way a three-headed snake. Eight applications have horsemen on them, some of them with beards, others without beards, all dressed in a short dress, with a chain mail and a knee shield. They are riding dashing ahead with spears in their hands.

A third group covers scenes of battles among animals: a doe attacked by a wolf; a griffin stepping on a deer; upright bears in battle. On the oval plate we have horse heads in a circle.

The detailed analysis of all objects from the treasure suggests that they have been produced by at least two craftsmen. The images contain an element of primitivism and naivety characteristic of Thracian art. They have been created during the 4th c. BC in the time of the Thracian ruler Cortis (383-360) and buried after his death, during the marches of some of the Macedonian kings Philip or Alexander the Great.

The ornaments on the applications must be judges as a whole. The ornamental motifs and the individual scenes express the general idea that the goddesses, one of which is certainly Demetra and the other is Kore, are represented in the manner of Thracian tradition. They have sexual contact with Zeus, who is presented either as a dragon-griffin or as a three-headed snake. Only on one of the plates this scared marriage (hierogamy) is expressed as a sexual contact between a man and a woman. From these contacts, according to Greek mythology, was born

god Dionysus, called Zargei by the Thracians. The suggestion that the horsemen on some of the plates must be interpreted as Zeus and Dionysus, which is untypical of ancient Greek art, is highly probable. This no doubt is a typically Thracian interpretation of the Hellenic myths. Therefore we have a blend of Greek and Thracian mythological personages, which produced original and unique images. Accompanied by partial or full figures of animals and scenes, they are among the original monuments of the Thracians created in the so-called animalistic style. This sacred artistic symbiosis contains the real importance and greatness of the discovery in Letnitsa.

# THE VARNA TREASURE

## THE TOILET OF A BYZANTINE NOBLE LADY



*Gold cross with enamel*

In the hot month of July 1961 started the building of an open cinema in Varna. In the first days of the digging students discovered at a depth of 1.50 m several gold objects. They immediately took them to the Varna

Historical Museum, which made its research. Scholars decided that this was female jewelry buried in the ground probably in a bag of cloth. When this happened could not be immediately determined but

the place of the find was beyond the limits of the ancient town of Odesos and there were no traces of buildings around. The find is at 500 m off the fortress wall and belongs generally to the early Byzantine period.

The treasure found consists of 9 items weighing 417 g. These are two massive bracelets, a diadem, parts of three necklaces, a cross and two belt applications. All are made of pure gold (over 22 carats). Undoubtedly most interesting are the two bracelets, weighing about 220 g or half of the whole find. Despite some differences they are similar in make and ornamentation. They consist of two semicircular parts, connected with a hinge. They are decorated with ornaments of plants: a vine twig with

leaves and grapes. In the oval shape thus formed are situated rosettes and highly stylized animal heads.

The diadem (fully preserved) represents two strips connected again by a hinge. On them there are filigreed rhombs, cross-like figures, palmetes and pearls.

The three necklaces are partly preserved. There are only three parts of the twisted wire preserved from one of them. From the second one are preserved 5 pieces, and from the third we have a large number of cylindrical beads. The three necklaces are ornamented with pearls or glass-like paste.

Greatest interest is presented by the cross made of gold plates, which make beds for the implantation of inlays of malachite and

*Gold bracelet with enamel*



THE VARNA TREASURE



*Necklaces*

*Tiara*



garnet in the form of stylized plants. This is the so-called cell technique in jewelry, widely used in the first half of the 1st millennium AD.

The belt applications are very similar in make to the cross. They also have stylized plant ornaments of malachite, garnets and pearl inlays.

The overall look of the treasure leaves no doubt that it represents a set of jewelry belonging to a prominent representative of the early Byzantine community in Odesos. In their production were masterfully used various goldsmith's techniques – molding and hammering of the gold plates, inlays of pearls, precious stones, glass and enamel. The jewelers also used filigreed ornaments, granulation and engravings, which demonstrates an unbelievable for its time mastery in jewelry. Similar goldsmith's techniques (the hinging technique, for example) are mostly characteristic of the 4th–5th c. AD. Analogical finds allow dating it around the beginning of the 6th c.

The beginning of Christianity is expressed in the numerous cross-like ornaments and most of all in the small cross itself, which has analogical examples from the same period. The rich though strongly stylized plant ornamentation is a symbolic expression of Heaven and also finds application in monuments of various nature. To strengthen this concept masters used colour variety: the green colour of the leaves, the white beads of the grapes, and the brown and purple tones of the surrounding flat surfaces. The form of the crosses can be seen in some monumental finds like the mosaics in the church of San Vitale (the period of

Justinian) or in the Saint Apolinario Nuovo church in Ravenna, in Rome and other cities.

The jewelry from Varna is no doubt the product of masterful goldsmiths. The elements of crudeness in comparison with finds from the Hellenic or the Roman period is compensated for by the colour diversity of the materials used. We can't expect that the treasure has been imported into the town. More probably it is the product of the Odesos school of jewelry making. This is also a proof of the prosperity of the town in the first half of the 6th c. It must have been buried into the ground in difficult times. Most probably these were the more and more numerous Barbaric attacks on the Empire.

# THE PERESHCHEPINA TREASURE

## KHAN KUBRAT'S GRAVE



Jug

On a summer day 90 years ago (in 1912) shepherd boys from the village of Maloe Pereshchepino, Poltav region in the Ukraine played by the small river of Vorskla. Unexpectedly one of them was stuck in the sand up to his waist. When they took him out they understood that he had fallen into a large gold vessel. The peasants collected other valuable objects with an overall weight of 20 kg of gold and 50 kg of silver. These were perfectly made eating vessels, many pieces of jewelry and richly ornamented weapons. Policemen and archeologists arrived from Kiev, collected the finds and took them away. Later all finds were taken to the largest Russian museum The Hermitage in the then capital of the Russian state.

This discovery raised many questions. The first one was the dating of the treasure. This was easy to answer. The objects had forms characteristic of the 7th c. AD since each historical period had its specific fash-



Khan Kubrat's rings

ion. The dating was aided by the coins of Byzantine emperors who ruled Byzantium in the middle of this century.

But then a new question arose – to what people do these treasures belong? There were objects of Byzantine, Persian and Barbarian origin. Scholar decided that the treasure has been collected for a long period through presents from foreign rulers, during wars or by buying valuable objects from other people. It was obvious that the treasure has not been buried accidentally and that it belonged to the grave of an important person, which contained his most valuable and favourable objects. Such a treasure could belong only to the Bulgarians who at that time inhabited the steppe of the Ukraine.

Therefore this must be some of their rulers and not a representative of the Avars, the Hazars and the Slavs, as was initially thought.

Then came the next question – who as this mighty ruler? The resolution of this question was taken up by one of the greatest German archeologists Prof. Joachim Werner. He studied all available data and concluded that this ruler could have been only the khan of Great Bulgaria. This state at the time covered a large territory along the rivers Dnepr, Don and Dnestar and must be recognized as the first state unification of the Bulgarians. As a child Kubrat was taken by his uncle Organa to the capital of Byzantium, Constantinople, where he lived for a couple



*Cup with cosmogonic events*

of years and came to know Byzantine culture and way of life. There he became friends with the future emperor Iraclius and this lasted till his death.

On returning to his homeland, Kubrat spearheaded the battle of his people against the Avars. After driving them away, he created about the year 630 the state of Great Bulgaria, which he ruled almost 30 years. After his death his sons buried him with great ceremony and soon separated as the state fell under the rule of the Hazars. His third son headed for the Danube where he founded a state, which is a continuation of the traditions of the old Bulgaria.

During the burial by the body of the deceased were laid two valuable gold sets of 12

pieces each. With them he used to treat his guests and nobles. These sets consisted of cups of massive gold and wine decanters. In addition in the grave were laid the most expensive clothes of the ruler and various jewels and ornaments – bracelets, necklaces, buckles and belt applications, and armament. Among them most impressive is the sword made of gold and precious stones. It is believed that the khan received this sword and other valuable objects as presents from his friend – the Byzantine Emperor. Ancient sources inform that the Emperor even pronounced Kubrat to be an honourable patrician (the highest title in Byzantium after the Emperor). A direct confirmation of it is his massive patrician buckle of gold weighing



*Amphora*



*Khan Kubrat's sword*

more than 400 gm. The Khan wore it on very special occasions together with the patrician sword.

We often ask ourselves the questions – did archeologists give the correct explanation of the treasure? Fortunately the finds contain the most solid proofs of that: Three gold rings, on which are engraved monograms with the name of Kubrat. In one of them he is even called “a honourable Byzantine patrician.”

Unfortunately the great state of Kubrat disintegrated after his death under the strong pressure of the Hazars. His five sons separated and took in different directions. Only Asparuh succeeded in fulfilling the goal of his father on the Balkan Peninsula.

The Pereshchepina Treasure is not an ordinary treasure. Its historic importance is invaluable as information about the first years of the Bulgarian state.

# THE MADARA GOLD JEWELRY

THE MAGIC BELTS  
OF PROTO-BULGARIANS



*Gold buckle  
for belt*

In one of the answers to the questions of Bulgarians addressed to Pope Nikolay in Rome Prince Boris complains that Greek clergymen deny Holy Communion to the newly converted to Christianity if they are wearing the traditional belts. What caused this veto will become clear after we describe two interesting finds from the village of Madara, the Shoumen region.

These are two sets of gold male belt applications whose leather has of course long disintegrated and disappeared. They bear the names of First and Second Madara belt ornaments by the order of their discovery in the necropolis under the Madara rock where the central sanctuary of the early mediaeval Bulgarian state is situated. The analyses made by many scholars of the style of the finds show that the second belt is older while the first one relates to a later period.

The second belt application was discovered in 1934 in the grave of a warrior. Next to the body of the man lay his horse. This leads us to the conclusion that it belonged to a proto-Bulgarian since this style of burial was characteristic for proto-Bulgarian tradition. The belt application consists of 12 round gold buttons 9 of which are smaller. The rest have a slightly oval form. There are also 5 belt end pieces (4 of them smaller) and a prolonged gold plate. The gold they are made of is of high quality. After the casting of the objects geometric ornaments were made on the surface. By means of granules (smaller or larger gold balls) are made triangles, rhombs and circles arranged in strict rows. The rims are decorated on all sides with the same granules and a band of

cord-like woven and welded gold strings (filigree technique). Right in the middle there is an inlay of round and ellipse-like glass paste enamel. While the first kind of decoration (granules and filigree) is a continuation of the ancient tradition of jewelry making, the use of variegated glass is taken to be Persian influence inherited by the Bulgarians quite early in the territories of Southern Russia and the Caucasus from the Sarmatians. The make and the ornamentation of this belt has analogies in other finds from Bulgarian lands from the end of the 7th and the 8th c. which is the period of the Madara find too.

The first Madara belt application was discovered in 1926 in an obviously Christian grave built of stone. Its decoration differs from that of the second belt. What is preserved is a gold buckle, a belt end piece, two oval applications with round rims, a hinge and 7 buttons with rings for attaching to the leather. The material used for making all the elements of the belt is pure gold. With the buttons there is also a limited use of granulation and filigree. The specificity of this belt is the use of cell enamel. It was applied after the desired ornaments were created by making a cell of vertically welded gold strips. In them is laid red email and green quartz. The basic motif uses plants and it is made by a cross-like interweaving of four two-leaf palmets. The belt end piece has a rim of "water leaves" (Lesbian kima). The soft oval lines of the applications and their decorations, combined with the clear tones of the enamel and the shine of the gold result in a perfection of jewelry making. The technique of cell enamel demonstrates strong Byzantine influence, which is sup-

ported by Eastern plastic motifs to produce the unbelievable and unique exquisiteness of the decoration. These features give ground to attribute the first belt application from Madara to the 9th c.

Among the archeological finds of proto-Bulgarian origin belt applications hold a special position. It is obvious that they were

given special importance. They were made of different materials – mostly bronze and gold. Scholars have the right to claim that the bronze ones belonged to ordinary men while the gold ones were made for the aristocracy. In both cases however they didn't have a utilitarian function only. They also combined medical and sacred concepts. It is



*Gold buckle  
for belt*

possible that the rectangular ornaments describe the structure of the universe and the plant ornaments – the Tree of the World to which the Tangra heathens paid homage.

It is highly probable that these hidden conceptions combined with the animal images (griffins, lions, birds) from other finds. This motivated the negative attitude of

Byzantine clergymen towards such heathen and anti-Christian phenomena. Holy Communion, according to them, was to be taken after taking them off the body.

Fortunately we are able to describe in detail the proto-Bulgarian belt. In a miniature of Emperor Basil II by Menologius there appears a Bulgarian warrior slaying a



*Application*

Christian. His long dress (kaftan) is girdled with a belt decorated with applications similar to those on the Madara belt. A knife, a horn, a small bag (probably for holding the flint and the tinder for making fire) and other objects hang down from the belt. A perfect confirmation of this item of art can be found in the stone sarcophagus of Pliska. It holds the skeleton of a man who, following the inscription on the lid, is one of Khan Omurtag's close associates – the candidate Turdach. Quite unexpectedly among the objects laid next to him there are pieces of his leather belt. It has a beautiful buckle and applications like those on the Madara belt, a long knife and other attributes hanging from it.

Compared with the written, artistic and archeological monuments, the two belts from Madara present an important contribution to Bulgarian art of jewelry making and an important source of knowledge about the life of Bulgarians in early middle ages.

# THE TREASURE OF NAGI SAINT MIKLOSH

THE FEAST CUTLERY  
OF PROTO-BULGARIANS

*Zoomorphic vessel*



The discoveries of a plowman more than two centuries ago (1799) caused a real sensation. This happened in the rich and fertile lands of Transylvania, a region in Hungary, at that time included in the empire of Austria-Hungary. Unexpectedly under the plow of the peasant sprang up 23 gold vessels, which weighed almost 10 kg. They bear the name of the Nagy Saint Miklós

*Jug with the image of a horseman*



Treasure, the closest village (in Bulgarian translation it means "Little Saint Nicholas").

The treasure was immediately taken to the capital Vienna where it is kept and shown to the visitors of the famous Vienna Museum of History and Art.

The gold is not the most valuable element of this treasure but its artistic and historical importance. It consists of 7 decanters, 4 cups with buckles for attaching them to the belt, 4 ordinary cups, 3 bowls in the shape of an animal (bulls), 2 paters, a tray

*Cup with medallions*



and a rhyton. Most of the vessels are richly decorated with geometrical and plant ornaments (palmetes, rosettes). On some of them can be seen fabulous animal images of griffins or anthropoid figures (half-people half-animals). Most interesting are the figural compositions on two of the decanters,



*Jug with a royal hunt scene*

included in round medallions, which no doubt have a ritual and mythical symbolic character. Among them are the scenes of the abduction of Ganymede by Zeus, in the impersonation of an eagle, the Persian goddess Anahita in the claws of an eagle, a griffin attacking a doe, a royal lion in a typically Persian style.

Most impressive among the scenes is that which depicts a horseman in a moment of triumph. He is clad in a heavy chain mail, on his head is a speared helmet. In his right hand he is holding a spear with a flag and with his left hand he is dragging a captive by the hair. This scene resembles very much the famous stone relief from the Madara village, which depicts no doubt the same idea of praising the victor. This similarity is the major reason for identifying the Nagi Saint Miklosh Treasure as proto-Bulgarian.

Thus we come to the question long standing before scholars – when was this invaluable treasure made and to what people did it belong? The form of the vessels and the decorations are a mixture of Byzantine, Persian and Turkic tradition. On some of them we can notice inscriptions in ancient Greek and Old Bulgarian which leads to the conclusion that the finds dates back to the time of the First Bulgarian kingdom.

It is well known that in the first half of the 9th c. the territories along the middle reaches of the Danube were part of the Bulgarian state. This is the time of the rule of Khan Kroum and Khan Omurtag. We can attribute the treasure to this period. During that period the best Bulgarian military commanders were sent there as rulers and governors of

Transylvania. There is almost no doubt that the rich set from Nagi Saint Miklosh belonged to one of them. The rich feasts organized by the Bulgarian rulers and their nobles are depicted in the illustrations to Byzantine chronicles – like the one organized by Khan Kroum after his victory over Emperor Nichiforus in 811. The treasure was probably buried in the ground at the time of some of the attacks of the Madziars in the end of the 9th c.

Although the Nagi Saint Miklosh Treasure is now outside the boundaries of Bulgaria, it still remains one of the most representative monuments of Bulgarian history and culture.

# THE PRESLAV TREASURE

THE RISE AND FALL OF GREAT PRESLAV



*Necklace*

*Gold application*

By the unwritten history of archeological discoveries the finds near Preslav are made in a similar way and they will remain under the name of the Preslav Treasure. This happened in the autumn of 1977, when the farmers decided to plant a new vineyard in Kastana. Digging deeply into the ground during the previous year, the tractor driver unearthed several gold objects but he didn't notice them from where he was sitting. Thus winter passed and in spring they started planting the vines. Then one of the farm workers came across the precious jewelry and cried out: "Come over! Look what a large mengish I found!" (This was the local name for large earrings). People crowded round her, dug the ground and found more jewels. They were immediately taken to the

mayor's office in Preslav where the mayor contacted the archeologists in Shoumen and archeological excavations began.

The treasure was not an ordinary one. It consisted of a large number of exquisitely made women's jewels and several silver Byzantine coins. Among them were earrings, necklaces, bracelets, buttons from expensive clothing, hair needles and the like. The plowshare had dispersed them over a large territory and archeologists couldn't understand where they were stored (in a leather or cloth bag or some wooden casket which had not been preserved). There were no traces of any building around and the place was at a considerable distance from the fortress wall of the capital city.

All sorts of techniques of jewelry making

were used in producing the objects: casting in moulds, hammering of ornaments with metal instruments, welding of small gold balls (granules) or fine gold wire (filigree), inlays of pearls and multi-colored enamel. All this speaks of the perfect craftsmanship of the Preslav goldsmiths.

Among the numerous objects two are of special interest and originality. The first one is a necklace consisting of 13 gold plates,



*Gold earring*

strung on a fine gold chain. From hang, again on chains, 7 drop-like medallions. On each of them and on the plates themselves are represented various images. By means of multicolored enamel are depicted the images of the Holy Mother and other saint, birds, beautiful leaves and other ornaments. This jewel is a perfect product of mediaeval goldsmith's craftsmanship. We don't have an analogy of it to this day.



*Piece from the crown  
of Alexander of  
Macedonia*

The second jewel is a diadem of a noble lady. It also consists of several gold plates. Some are not preserved but those found show that the ornamentation on them is unusual. The central plate depicts the Macedonian king Alexander the Great, rising to the sky in a chariot with two griffins. This ancient motif is commonly used in Byzantine art from where it was borrowed into Bulgarian art. The plate also contains other fabulous and mythological images among which we notice winged dogs. This forms a composition unfamiliar to European medieval art and the result of the strong influence of antiquity. There is only one diadem from Kiev, which resembles it, but it is of a later period and of a cruder make.

It is not possible to describe all items of the treasure but it is important to determine the period when it was created and buried into the ground. This probably happened in difficult times for the Second Bulgarian capital Preslav. The Byzantines attacked the Bulgarian State and in 971 they captured Great Preslav. We learn about this period also from the coins in the treasure, which are related to the rule of emperors Constantine VII and Roman II (middle of 10th c.). Therefore the treasure has been buried some time after this. The most probable explanation is that in these difficult moments some Bulgarian noble decided to leave the capital. He took with him his family and the most valuable things. For reasons unknown to us the treasure had to be buried into the ground and its owner intended to come back and take it. But it didn't happen and the invaluable monument was preserved for us to enjoy.

The Preslav Treasure helps us to come in contact with the rich culture of Great Preslav and in the same time to know of its tragic fate and its fall under Byzantine rule.

# THE NIKOPOL TREASURE

## ONE OR TWO TREASURES IN BALINOVTCI



*Bracelets*

The story of this family jewelry is really unusual. For we are talking of two finds discovered one after the other and very close to each other in a period of more than 50 years. For that reason they are known to historians as the First and Second Nikopol Treasures. The proximity, their character and the style of the objects, the period of the coins in the treasures give us ground to presume that this is one and the same treasure. But before giving an answer to this question, we must describe them.

The First Nikopol Treasure was discovered in 1915 in the area of Harmanlak near Nikopol, in a vineyard. While digging the ground people found near the surface a

*Necklace*



copper bowl containing two silver cups, parts of a larger silver vessel, silver spoons and jewelry (belt applications, earrings and a bracelet). Of great importance are the coins of the Bulgarian kings Ivan Alexander (depicted with his son Michael), Ivan Sratsimir, of the Turkish Sultan Baiazid I and of the Wallach voivode Mircho I the Old. The last two died in the beginning of the 15th c. (1402 and 1418). Therefore the treasure dates from a previous period (probably from the end of the 14th c.).

In digging the ground in 1971 the tractor unearthed at the same spot and at 50 cm deep another treasure, called the Second Nikopol Treasure. Generally it consists of analogical objects – vessels, jewelry, coins of the Bulgarian kings Ivan Alexander, Michael Shishman, Ivan Shishman, Ivan Sratsimir, of the Turkish Sultans Murad I and

*Ear pendants*



Baiazid I Ildarum, as well as of the Wallach voivode Vladislav I and Mirchol. Naturally the youngest coins could be attributed to the period of the beginning of the 15th c. Some scholars consider that these two numismatic finds are not two separate treasures but one but later divided into two.

Generally speaking the objects in the two treasures are of the same type and most of them are made of silver of very high quality (mostly the vessels), while the jewelry is made of gold. For example, the Second Treasure alone contains 3.5 kg of silver and about 300 g of gold. Some of the vessels are gilded.

The jewels are of various kinds and functions: gold ear pieces with bi-conical, pyramidal and spherical form, bracelets made of rounded gold wire, spherical and semi-spherical dress buttons (in the Second Treasure they are 157) made of silver and gilded, a gold necklace with pendants, silver neck rings (torkvi). The vessels include



small bowls, cups and several dishes and deep plates. Here belong silver spoons with inscriptions in Bulgarian on some of them.

Various techniques of jewelry making are used, based on applying special molds. The vessels have rich ornaments of plant, geometrical, zoomorphic and rarely anthropomorphic motifs. Very rich is the ornamentation of one of the ellipse-like bowls of gilded silver. While with the other vessels the ornaments are found only on the bottoms, the surface of this bowl is fully covered with images of plants, animals and birds enclosed as a rule into round or ellipse-like medallions.

After the molding of the objects (primarily the jewels) they receive additional ornaments by using granulation, filigree, engravings, inlays of glass paste and glass crosses (the cell techniques). These goldsmith's techniques create a rich and plastic decoration, which makes the treasure into a paragon of applied art.

*Tiara*

The question of whether we are dealing with two different treasures or one divided into two is much more difficult. The close proximity and the similarities in style are not enough to give a categorical answer. Some scholars suggest that the treasure has been buried into the ground about 1396, when the Turks destroyed the Christian army of Hungarians and Poles lead by the Hungarian king Sigismund. This happened not far from the town of Nikopol and in those troublesome times some of the members of Nikopol aristocracy left the town hiding their valuable objects hoping to return.

*Oval-shaped vessel with ornaments*



It is believed that the Second Nikopol Treasure was buried in 1444, the time of the march of the Polish king Vladislav Yagelo, who perished by Varna and was called Varnenchik. The Christian army consisting of Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Serbians, and Bulgarians besieged Nikopol but didn't succeed in capturing it. It is possible that after lifting the siege some of the nobles of Nikopol followed Vladislav's army seek refuge. They might have buried their riches, in a manner similar to the First Treasure. Fortunately the inscriptions on the silver spoons allow us to know the name of the owner of the Second Treasure. Marking the owner of the spoons, the inscriptions contain the name Balin (Balina, which suggests family relations with the Nikopol noble Todor Balina). At the end of the 16th c. he organized a failed rebellion against the Turks. It is highly possible that the Balina from the treasure was some of his predecessors.

If we accept the versions about the two treasures being buried at different times, divided by almost 50 years, it is difficult to image them being parts of the same treasure. But such a hypothesis cannot be completely discarded. As we can see the valuable items in the treasure were the property of an aristocratic family from Nikopol and we can presume that it has been handed down from generation to generation. On the other hand their similarity allows that such objects were very common among the nobles in general since they represent the popular fashion of the time. In any case the items of goldsmith's craftsmanship – jewels and vessels – are central in studying a crucial period of Bulgarian history, when it fell under for-

ign domination for centuries. Despite various foreign influences, a Western one included, they are the product of the Bulgarian craftsmen.

# CONCLUSION

The described treasures, representing only a small part of the historical and artistic treasury of our lands, give a generalized impression about the cultures blossoming at different periods. They refer to pre-history, antiquity and the middle ages and cover several millennia. Their importance is many-sided. They are valuable historical monuments, indications of the achievements of culture and art and strong instruments of aesthetical education. They have their main share in our national self-consciousness as Bulgarians. The more so when they inspire great interest abroad – in scholarly circles and among the general public. The numerous exhibitions in renowned world museums of art and history in Europe, America and Asia really contribute to this process.

Dimitar Ovcharov  
**FIFTEEN TREASURES  
FROM BULGARIAN LANDS**

Bulgarian  
Second edition

Translated by *Maya Pencheva*  
Edited by *Vassilka Shishkova*  
Design by *Konstantin Radoslavov*  
Technical editor *Valya Ilieva*  
Desktop publishing *Galya Gerassimova*,  
*Konstantin Radoslavov*

Format 60x90/8  
Printed by *Dunav Press JSC*

Bulgarian Bestseller  
National Museum  
of Bulgarian Books and Polygraphy



ISBN 954-9308-76-6



9 789549 308761

Price 15 BGN